

Life in Prison for Gunman in Paladin Club Shooting

Other defendants face prison time for murder and weapons charges

One of the men responsible for the murders of a Wilmington couple in 2013 will spend the rest of his life in prison. Aaron Thompson, 34, of Wilmington was sentenced to two life terms plus 45 years for his June 2017 conviction on two counts of Murder First Degree, two counts of Possession of a Firearm During the Commission of a Felony, and Conspiracy First Degree for the murders of Joseph and Olga Connell. In September 2013, the Connells were killed outside of their home on Paladin Drive in Wilmington. Mr. Connell's business partner Christopher Rivers planned the murders in order to collect on an insurance policy that he and Joseph Connell took on each other in order to protect their business. In April 2016, a Superior Court jury convicted Rivers on two counts of Murder First Degree, two counts of Possession of a Firearm During the Commission of a Felony, Conspiracy First Degree, and Criminal Solicitation First Degree. Rivers was sentenced to two life terms plus 50 years. The other alleged hitman, 26-year-old Dominique Benson, faces retrial for murder and weapons charges in November after a jury convicted him of Conspiracy First Degree and hung on the remaining charges when he was tried along with Rivers. Deputy Attorneys General Jenna Milecki, Colleen Norris, and Karin Volker prosecuted the case, with assistance from paralegal Stacey Coupe and social worker Evelyn Smith.

Deputy Attorneys General Joe Grubb and William Leonard secured a conviction for a 19-year-old from Wilmington for a 2016 shooting that left one man dead. A Superior Court jury found Joshua Gonzalez guilty of Murder First Degree, 3 counts of Possession of a Firearm During the Commission of a Felony,

Possession of a Firearm by a Person Prohibited (Juvenile), Attempted Murder First Degree, Reckless Endangering First Degree, Carrying a Concealed Deadly Weapon, and Conspiracy First Degree. In March 2016, Gonzalez fatally shot 22-year-old Christian Serrano in the 200 block of N. Connell Street in Wilmington. Gonzalez, who was 17 at the time of the shooting, faces a minimum mandatory 25 years in prison for the murder, with a maximum of life in prison. He faces a total of 49 $\frac{1}{2}$ years minimum mandatory when sentenced by a judge at a later date. Detective Robert Fox of the Wilmington Police was the Chief Investigative Officer, with DOJ paralegal Jaime Prater, social workers Evelyn Smith and Jen Kutney, and special investigator Guillermo Santiago assisting with the case.

A 34-year old Wilmington man pled guilty as the result of being found with a gun after a traffic stop. In February 2017, Wilmington Police stopped a car driven by Stephan DeShields at the intersection of East 4th and North Poplar Streets after seeing him drive through the city at speeds estimated between 90-100 miles per hour. A search of DeShields's car led to the discovery of a loaded .45 caliber semi-automatic handgun. The defendant pled guilty to one count of Possession of a Firearm by a Person Prohibited. DeShields, prohibited from having a gun because of previous felony convictions including drug and assault charges, was immediately sentenced by a Superior Court judge to 10 years in prison, followed by 6 months of probation.